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POPULAR PARTICIPATION BY WHOM AND HOW: TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT

by
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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Less than four decades ago, a glorious hope began to sprout in the blossom of Africa. From a timid whisper till it became a deafening roar, the cry went up ... "Africa shall be free". It gradually became conceivable that we might shed our colonial yoke for the resplendent garb of free peoples... free to develop on the basis of our own collective brain and brawn and in tune with our cultural identities. The continent entertained the erstwhile impossible dream that enslaved Africa would, in the shortest span of time, not only achieve development but catch up with its former masters.

There was no problem then in understanding that in order to liberate ourselves and march forward as free beings, we needed every man, woman and child to be involved. Popular participation reached the zenith of its expression in the independence struggles of African peoples. The phenomenal task ahead demanded nothing less than unleashing and galvanizing the creative energies of every citizen. Independence, the foundation for true national development, was inconceivable under any other circumstances. And although various African countries wrested their independence from the clutches of colonialism through applying varying degrees of direct, violent struggle, none did so behind the back of the popular masses. No single African nation came into being through the exclusive enlightened and genteel efforts of small elites. It took the massive groundswell of unstoppable popular pressure to achieve what had seemed impossible.

Yet, barely four decades on, the various African elites who were entrusted with the furtherance of the people's hard-won victories had managed not only to quench the last embers of hope and return the continent to the dark ages of foreign domination, they have robbed the very concept of popular participation of any meaning. A process of self-liberation which could not take off without popular participation was taken up and prosecuted by our elites as if the direct contribution of the citizens had no place in history. These elites saw themselves, rather falsely, in the image of their former masters and, often worse than the colonizers, these elites exclude their own people from the agenda of national development. They sought to bribe their way to development and the twentieth century leaving their people behind!

So now, in the twilight of the twenth century a century within which we had hoped to achieve the stature of a respected peoples, developing their culture and themselves proudly alongside other peoples of the world a century in which we had hoped to wipe out the primordial disgrace of an enslaved peoples now a century which threatens to expire leaving Africa in its stupor we now ask WHAT IS POPULAR PARTICIPATION !!

My focus on Africa is deliberate. I am well aware that impoverished African nations form only a part of the larger agglomeration called THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES ... a euphemism for UNDER-DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. However, if this paper is to respond effectively to the question, HOW, its gaze must be telescoped to the African continental space.

CLARIFICATION OF PERSPECTIVE

In examining the concept, popular participation, I shall not be concerned to offer a scholarly exposition. Libraries the world over are full of outstanding scholarly papers on the subject and I am neither competent nor inclined to add one more to such a distinguished body of literature.

I am an ordinary ITINERANT doctor of medicine ... a doctor who, having refused merely to mend and patch up the broken bodies and minds of a once-proud people now

reduced to permanent collective debilitation. lost his interest and place in the orthodox Western medical universe of his country. Having thus been converted to an itinerant status and obliged to trudge from village to hamlet to farmstead. directly mixing with and learning from our excluded peoples. my perspective on popular participation is determined by deep respect for and concern with popular interests. Therefore. the paper is not burdened with scholarly abstraction or a dispassionate scientific objectivity. This is a paper derived from gut-level feeling and conviction. It is based on widely recognized facts attested to by the daily worsening plight of Africa and the majority of its peoples. My attitude is influenced by my personal contact with the great treasures: popular initiative. creativity and resilience. Which treasures are so systematically denied by our elite and foreign-dominated modes of governance, to the ultimate detriment of all of Africa.

POPULAR PARTICIPATION .. Some preliminary remarks:

In all African countries. the generality of the people have been excluded from any critical contribution to national direction. Their collective and individual creativity have been rudely denied. Their efforts. born of great resilience. to survive and nature communities have been rendered extremely difficult by policies imposed from above. They have had to watch "helplessly" as the surplus generated from their sweat has been drained away by internal and external hemorrhages.

In two decades of close contact it has been my great privilege to observe directly how our people have managed to survive despite these potentially annihilative forces. They have continued to deploy their collective initiative and creativity in various forms of micro-organizations. producing in their efforts the only achievements we can authentically call development. For it is not in terms of the skyscrapers. the resource-guzzling assembly plants called manufacturing industries: the daily flash of obscene luxuries: the mindless white elephant projects or empty international posturing that a nation's development is evaluated. Rather. it is in the daily efforts of the people to produce and reproduce their life-supporting systems and themselves. It is in how they live harmoniously with nature, accepting and giving, not destroying. It is the way a people's labours make and advance their collective culture. It is in the value that they place on the worth of the human being. It is in how effective social justice is allowed to guide their social relations. It is in how much solidarity they manage to imbue their society with. It is in the extent to which every citizen comes critically to feel that he or she contributes directly to defining the society's direction.

For anyone who has had the privilege of participating directly with the people in various micro-organizations for development. there can be no confusion as to the meaning and import of popular participation in national development. It is clear to such critical participants that the only obstacle in the way of the full flowering of popular participation is the African elite with their
unrelenting misrule of the continent. And the fundamental dichotomy in our societies is precisely that between. on the one hand. a struggling peoples, insistently inching forward (where they might have leapt) in development despite all odds. and. on the other. their profligate ruling elites who place more faith in external magic than on the creativity of their people.

The mere mention of popular participation will. in many elite circles. raise the specter of one bogey or the other. Depending on the exact location in terms of social status, privilege and power of the listener, the bogey takes more or less horrendous form.

To some, it would conjure up the calamity of GENERAL ANARCHISM and total dissolution of society. To some others it would herald the return to BARBARISM ... whoever heard of rustic, illiterate peasants or 'mindless' factory hands guiding the ship of a modern nation State! While to yet others, it signals the mad on-rushing of COMMUNISM, that evil system which must expropriate them of their luxuries conferred on them by divine right!

The least sanguinous view of popular participation is that which derives from the Western-ethnocentric view that popular participation is synonymous with universal adult suffrage ... a view which is sold as the ultimate in democratic political practice. We have no quarrel with universal adult suffrage as a fundamental right of all peoples. It is important, however, to emphasize that universal adult suffrage is only a part of popular participation in development. The ease with which transnational advertising agencies have taken over ballot box democracy, robbing people's decisions of real substance; presenting them with glossed up and camouflaged emptiness and false images; selling candidates and policies as they would a bad soap, must demonstrate the severe limitations of so-called Western democracy. We do not however deny the considerable achievements of this genre of democratic practice, we merely make a distinction between it and popular participation. The same people who are free to vote for carefully packaged policies and synthetic, celluloid candidates, find their participatory rights severely limited in other crucial areas of national concern.

POPULAR PARTICIPATION ... A deeper conceptualization

The foregoing general remarks need to be carried further so that we may examine this concept, popular participation, at a deeper level. I shall attempt to start this process of deeper penetration by way of brief notes which will be tentative, hoping to benefit from fuller and richer discussion at workshop level.

1. Popular participation is not a mere statistical aggregate. It will be a mechanistic view which seeks to define or comprehend popular participation in terms of percentages of total population. Any attempt to petrify into static figures such a dynamic, ever-expanding and complex phenomenon must severely impoverish our understanding. The sterile argument as to who does or does not belong to the normative category, popular, can only seriously distract us from adequately plumbing the depths of popular participation in social development.

2. Popular participation is the very essence of human communities. Without a doubt, one of the main advantages of aggregation into communities is the creation of the most appropriate condition for 'progress' or development for human beings. Indeed it is one of the basic pre-requisites for the continued survival of Homo Sapiens. Development is not and cannot be an attribute of isolated, unsocialised human animals. Once the human community is established, it can only function effectively as an ORGANIC ENTITY, all its 'CELLS' being involved in shaping and re-shaping the overall body as they shape and re-shape themselves.

3. Development is not merely a transformation of structures and material attributes of a society. More profoundly, in order for development to be authentic and sustainable, the human beings who transform their physical environment must also transform themselves in the process. This process of self-transformation is an act of culture; an act of self-liberation from outworn concepts, beliefs, skills, etc. Hence, it is fundamentally impossible without granting every citizen the status of CRITICAL BEING. A society is developed only to the extent that its

citizens are themselves developed, not as a result merely of the physical attributes of that society, no matter how magnificent.

4. The human animal is distinguished in evolution as AN ANIMAL OF PRAXIS. In order truly to be, human beings must constantly engage in action upon nature around them and, importantly, in reflection upon their actions. It is this unending immersion in the creative interplay of action – reflection – action – etc., that our humanity is realized and our harmony with nature assured. Thus, praxis as a cardinal attribute of human beings demands that we must maintain a critical presence as subjects, not objects of history. The essence of popular participation is to constantly deepen for the people this status of critical subjects of history and true protagonists of their development.

5. At least for the foreseeable future, we must accept that human societies will be characterized by leaders and the led. The relationship between these two categories is a dialectical one which is characterized by more or less tension. Perhaps, in order to point up the true nature that this dialectic ought to have, for a humane and sustainable society, we should conceive of them as: leader-followers and follower-leaders. Any failure properly to balance this dialectic, allowing it to tilt in the direction of an overdose of leadership will quickly lead to barbaric authoritarianism. And the only way to ensure that this desertification of the human experience does not happen is constantly to strengthen critical popular participation.

6. Popular participation does not imply, as some would insist, unmanageable gigantic assemblies where everyone has his/her say in a situation of absolute bedlam. Neither does it connote a brutal homogenization of human beings in pursuit of uniformity. It is simply a recognition that development takes place only within social space. And any society, excepting the smallest city state, is made up of several spaces: the local, regional and national spaces. Development takes place in all of these spaces and in various dimensions the local space being the most active in terms of direct involvement of the people in development. Effective popular participation is the only means through which social spaces of development can be properly articulated with human self-fulfilment, necessary solidarity with other human beings and with nature, as well as social justice, in a way that creates a desirable, humane and sustainable society.

7. Popular participation is based on the acknowledgement of the vitality of micro-organizations formed by the people in their daily efforts at survival and the importance of building the nation up from these popular organizations.

8. Our world is one which is unfortunately characterised by acceptance of the might-is-right philosophy, where powerful nations impose their will and interests on weaker ones. If a nation is to be able to assert its own personality and its right to develop without subservience to others, it needs great internal strength. This strength can only be conferred through critical popular participation in development which makes a people willing to defend, at all costs, their hard-won freedom. And recent history amply demonstrates to us that a people, no matter how small, once united in solidarity and trust, will successfully stand up to the most powerful predator nations of the world.

In a nutshell, therefore, popular participation (in development) is not a luxury which a State may or may not choose to indulge in. It is the very pre-condition for real development for all peoples and far transcends the boundaries laid down by even the most expensive democracies to date. It is a recognition that each and every citizen needs to and should have effective contribution to the development of ideas and priorities in the nation. People need to be given the opportunity constantly to have their views heard and considered in the building of their society. It is the profound commitment born of such effective participation that motivates a people to excel themselves and defend with all their might, the society jointly built by their efforts and ideas. The concept of popular participation relies on the fact that already people have built and continue to generate different forms of organizations under the impetus of the need to be involved. And, these organizations within which the people contribute their voices, which they can creatively mature, which they can freely reshape to respond ever more correctly to their feeling needs and aspirations, should be the building blocks for erecting the larger nation and its representative institutions. Popular participation within popular organizations affords the only secure basis on which popular self-management may depend. It is however not a soft-headed utopia but a complex interplay of various forces, needs, and opinions in the spirit of solidarity and commitment to a common cause. It is not free of tension but offers people the opportunity to learn to create in the spirit of giving and taking and constant readiness to accommodate other's perspectives. At its core is the need for thorough-going social justice to prevail. It demands great courage and commitment of those who are called upon to be leader-followers.

BUT HOW?

Is our advocacy of popular participation a mere pipe dream, a utopia postulate which may inspire poetic flights of fancy but which has no place in the real world of harsh concrete options? We think rather not. If popular participation is not to exist only in the realm of ideals the question, HOW, must be answered.

Some approaches and prescriptions examined

The generally cynical response of most people to any talk of effective popular participation as not being merely desirable but actually worth striving for, is based on the uniformly dismal showing of almost every prescription offered so far for its realisation in practice. As a prelude therefore to our own proposal it would be useful to briefly examine some of these approaches in search of useful hints.

1. Top of the list is the universal adult suffrage approach which we have examined earlier. While this very important and fundamental human right plays a major role in the participatory process, it is very prone to abuse. Indeed, as is evidenced in the Western industrial democracies, the very logic of capitalist mass-persuasion methods has nearly emptied this right of much of its inherent force. More and more, the exercise of the franchise becomes an indulgence in collective self-delusion for whole peoples. Advertising agencies that have developed the skills for selling tinsel as pure gold have turned their attention to the political arena. The image of the presidential or prime ministerial candidate that people assess and vote for is more often the creation of brilliant advertisers, not the real flesh and blood enigma which their votes would usher to the seat of supreme power! Even policies as criminally damaging as the privatization of public library services and even drinking water supply may be rendered acceptable to voters through appropriately crafted advertisement. Nearer home here, the depredations of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) are glossed up and represented as sheer

salvation by appropriate adverts. Of course, in so-called third world countries, it has proved impossible to even approximate the gains of the ballot box option in the West. Rather than lead to any positive impact by the people on the political process, the road to the polling booths has, for our people, been gratuitously strewn with dangers and even death. So, we may dismiss this approach in our discussion of how to achieve popular participation.

2. Closely allied to the ballot box option are a number of fetishes which have been prescribed as steps to effective popular participation. The endless debates on the virtues of multi-partyism, so-called political pluralism in relation to actual popular participation are, in our case in Africa, a mere waste of time. This fetish must not blind us to the nature of the politico-historical environment under question.

Because of the continental misfortune of a prevalence of military dictatorships in Africa, we are presented another option in fetishized form. Popular hopes and aspirations are titillated by the promise of 'civilian rule' as panacea for the problem of popular exclusion from history. Most African peoples have found to their utmost chagrin that there is no real choice between the military and civilian elites; indeed, it is a matter of choosing by which serpent one shall be bitten, where one is just as poisonous as the other. Indeed, rather than foster anything like popular participation, these fetishized options lead more surely to popular resignation.

3. There have been various other options more grotesque and criminal than mere fetishism. From time to time, it has suited the demagogic purposes of African Governments to proclaim a commitment to unfettered popular debate of crucial policy issues. A people, hungry for meaningful participation, have often credulously leapt at such offers, pouring encomiums on the benevolent God-sent leaders, only to find out in the end, and at great cost, that it was all a hoax. They had been herded off into a wild goose chase whilst their treasury was looted and their national dignity pawned to foreign usurers!!

Various versions of GUIDED DEMOCRACY have been proffered to rule the people into a state of false security and at the end of the day, another government has guided its people away from participating in defining their own future.

There are far too many governmental subterfuges employed by ruling elites to frustrate their people's legitimate aspirations to effective participation than we could discuss here. Suffice it to say that all the schemes to date, floated by governments to 'mobilize' the people, have nothing whatsoever to do with critical popular participation in development; rather, they have had the uniform effect of demobilizing the people!

4. Perhaps the only approaches worth serious consideration are those deriving from the continuing struggles within international multilateral organizations. Whatever their other weaknesses, it must be said to the credit of the United Nations and some of its agencies that the present intensification of the campaign to involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the mainstream of development debates, is their doing. The relevance of this fact is that NGOs, as a result of their often deep commitment to popular organizations, do serve as effective vehicles for popular mobilization. It was not the goodwill of third world nations or northern governments which produced this drive. And, I am convinced that, in the long run, whatever successful approaches are finally produced, we would have this drive to thank for it. It is however, still early, very early days yet, and the journey has only just begun.

As adjunct to its drive to empower the 'third system', the multilateral organizations employ information gathering, analyses and dissemination backed by comprehensive research to raise awareness of the crucial issues. Through these in-depth studies, freely circulated to governments, they struggle to persuade these rulers of the wisdom and necessity of encouraging effective popular participation for development. However, this is precisely the weakness of these approaches and the agencies themselves. Their impact on governments is severely limited and all they can do is APPEAL. Even in mounting their appeals they must tread very gingerly indeed or they stand accused of INTERFERING IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF A SOVEREIGN STATE ... the ultimate insulation for bankrupt ruling elites!!!

ACHIEVING POPULAR PARTICIPATION ... A prolonged struggle

From all that has been said so far, it would have become clear that it is one thing to characterize and fully understand the concept, popular participation, it is quite another setting out to achieve it in practice. As we set out in this part of the paper to consider concrete proposals in answer to the question: how, we might do well to consider the following factors which have important bearing on the task:

1. Our struggles in Africa to achieve effective popular participation and hence proper development must take account of our enduring status as subservient nations of the world. While this may sound rather harsh, it is nevertheless true that for many African nations what has been achieved is no more than FLAG INDEPENDENCE. We have achieved the right formally to hoist flags of our choice while even political independence in its most profound sense still eludes us ... not to talk about economic independence. This subservient status places extremely heavy burdens on even the most progressively inclined governments, obliging them to pursue so-called structural adjustment policies which further ruin their economies and peoples. Such policies and the political climate that they necessarily generate are not the most conducive to achieving the necessary rapprochement between governments and their peoples.

2. The constant struggles and conflicts among various interests in society are also factors which seriously influence popular participation. The State, at any period, in the last resort, is the expression of the interests of the dominant social agglomeration. The fact that the generality of the people remain excluded in most African countries is a sure indicator that these nations (and their States) are dominated by the interests of minorities, i.e., of the elites. This is perhaps one of the most daunting obstacles that the effort at achieving effective popular participation in development must contend with. As a result of the social monopoly of power, both political and economic by this small elite, the push for popular participation must run counter to existing policy trends in our nations.

3. In consequence of the above, it [illegible]me an unaltering law that effective popular participation cannot be ushered in by any incumbent governments in Africa or elsewhere. The counter-pressure from those interests which sustain the State are often too strong. It is vital for us to recognize this limitation placed on even the most well-meaning governments. Depending upon the correctness of our praxis, however,

governments could from time to time be obliged to make meaningful concessions to popular participation. The obverse of this possibility, of course, that under popular pressure and not being able to repudiate the socially dominant interests governments would often try to coax the protagonists of effective popular participation into the CO-OPERATION TRAP. And constant vigilance is of the utmost essence.

4. It is important to realise that effective popular participation is not an event. It is a PROCESS, a MOVEMENT which becomes wider and deeper the more resolutely and untiringly a people strive for it. It is, in essence, a state of ever greater becoming for a people. This realization would assist its protagonists to avoid making the terrible mistake of believing that any government might, one bright morning, decree popular participation into being. Indeed any such promised government largesse must be treated to a hefty chunk of suspicion.

5. Effective popular participation cannot be a gift. It has to be struggled for in every way possible within the legal frameworks of individual African nations. And there is a lot of room yet to be explored in these seemingly suffocating frameworks. The struggle must be carried out as part of a cultural struggle to restore the cultural dignity of African peoples. This obliges the people and their 'Third System' (VDO) allies to avoid as much as possible, all unnecessary dependence on external forces. The watchword must be CRITICAL SELF-RELIANCE.

6. The struggle to achieve effective popular participation, while integrating the various national spaces of development, must be a continent-wide one. No single African country could or should go it alone.

The challenge that confronts us is a most daunting one indeed. Africa is, without a doubt, in the life-crushing grips of a terrible crisis that threatens its entire fabric. ECA preliminary observations on the World Bank report ., "Africa's Adjustment and Growth in the 1980s" ., STATISTICS AND POLICIES, as well as the most recent ECA study and recommendation contained in the AFRICAN ALTERNATIVE FRAMWORK to SAP, say it all for those who may still be in doubt as to the gravity of the situation in which we are caught. We cannot look to the generosity of the North to bail us out and we are so thoroughly drained of what was more than ample resources that we cannot resort to any store of material resources waiting to be deployed. The only real resource that we have now and that in great abundance, simply waiting to be correctly utilized, is our immense human resource. Only effective popular participation, bringing to the rescue of the continent the limitless initiative, creativity and resilience of our peoples, can turn the tide of our continental misfortunes and usher in a new era of effective and sustainable development for the entire continent and its peoples.

WE MAKE A PROPOSAL

For many years now and in many international fora, serious attention has been focused on this problem of Africa's steady decline and how to halt and reverse it. We can mention here only but a few:

(a) The United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD);

(b) The seminar on "The State and Crisis in Africa: In Search of a Second Liberation", organized under the auspices of the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation in 1986;

(c) The International Conference on "Africa: The Challenge of Economic Recovery and Accelerated Development", organized by ECA with the support of the OAU and ADB, in Abuja, Nigeria in June 1987;

(d) The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, 1980;

(e) The UN-NGO Conference: "Africa Four Years on, 1988, organized by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS/Geneva); and

(f) The African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformations (AAF-SAP) produced by ECA, 1989, as a human and sustainable replacement to current draconian SAPs.

All these efforts as well as our own modest proposal that follows are united in viewing the task ahead as no less than the search for a SECOND LIBERATION FOR AFRICA.

The essence of our proposal is that people learn to participate by actually participating. This can only be most effectively done on the basis of their own existing (and newly generated) popular organizations. The proposal seeks therefore ways and means of using such popular organizations as basic building blocks, integrated with their allies (VDOs and NGOs) and from local through regional to national spaces of development in national consortial/umbrella organizations. It seeks to integrate the various national consortia into an African continental network for effective popular participation in Africa's economic recovery and development.

The ideas behind the proposal are presented below in annotated skeletal form. It is hoped that this bare sketch, supplemented by an appendix made up of some working papers in the ongoing effort to define the Nigerian Association of Voluntary Development Organizations (NAVDO), would prove a satisfactory basis for detailed discussion of this proposal.

The skeletal framework is as follows:

1. At the centre of the proposal shall be POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS (direct encounter popular associations ... DEPAS) within which the people have not only a voice but total control. These are organizations like small-holder farmers' co-operatives; popular consumer protection associations; women's self-improvement and protection associations; youths' skill-improvement clubs, etc., which are located directly in the primary local space of development in each country;

2. These popular organizations are regarded as voluntary development organizations (VDOs) in their own right. Indeed what they do in their day-to-day direct encounter with survival is what development is all about and they can be encouraged to do more, quantitatively and qualitatively;

3. The basic needs of these popular organizations in order for them to serve as vehicles for effective popular participation are:

(a) Material resources to advance their organizational effort ... productive, consumer defensive, community developing youth skill improving, etc.:

(b) Effective organization at local level, articulated with efforts at regional and national levels,

(c) Effective fora for appropriate exposure to main national policy issues, for expressing their own felt needs, for exchanging ideas and opinions amongst themselves, and for publicizing their collective views ... within all the three spaces of development:

(d) Mechanisms for articulating these national efforts into a continental whole: and

(e) Opportunities for implementing some of their collective ideas in practical programmes --- for their demonstrational effect:

4. Closely linked with these popular organizations are other 'third system' organizations, VDOs and NGOs. These are regarded as FACILITATOR ASSOCIATIONS (FAS) which work to help the popular organizations achieve the basic needs stated under (3) above;

5. The popular organizations and facilitator associations must be united as members (on equal footing) of a national umbrella organization/consortium of VDOs ... e.g., Nigerian Association of Voluntary Development Organizations (NAVDO), Ghana Association of Private Organizations in Development (GAPVOD), Conseil des organisations non-gouvernementales d'appui au developpement, Senegal (CONGAD) etc;

6. In order not to itself negate its very purpose, the structure of this umbrella organization must be BICAMERAL from local to national spaces --- (see appendix 1 ... "Thoughts on a Bicameral Structure for NAVDO ... implications for its Constitution"). The popular organizations (DEPAS) must be represented in parallel fashion with the facilitator associations (FAS) at all levels of the structure and from local to national spaces. The structure is to be characterized by co-ordinating committees, SERVING the larger and more powerful mass bodies instead of the conventional case where powerful executive committees and councils, secretariats, etc., govern and laud it over supposedly sovereign mass bodies ... (see appendix 2 ... 'Structure of NAVDO).

Accountability within this structure must be, in the final analysis, to the popular organizations which shall hold legislative powers in the consortium. This consortium must, in all respects, reflect the decisive need to EMPOWER THE PEOPLE and their grass-roots organizations;

7. This umbrella organization, while leaving the autonomies of its members intact, must evolve a GENERAL PROGRAMME whose sole rational is to assist the popular organizations fulfil the needs set out under (3) above; as well as other needs that may develop with the effort;

8. Beyond this, given the low level of effective voluntary development consciousness in most African countries, this umbrella organization must also have a supplementary programme. This will be directed at raising the level of consciousness of and commitment to voluntary development work;

9. Apart from providing the popular organizations with ever larger national fora for self-expression, the umbrella organization shall serve as the link between popular organizations (and FAS) in the different countries of Africa ... e.g., Forum for the African Voluntary Development Organizations FAVDO). This of course implies that this continental organization also be structured as a BICAMERAL FAVDO to reflect the dominance in the various BICAMERAL NATIONAL CONSORTIA, of the flesh and spirit of popular organizations. We call here for no less than the beginnings of the POPULAR UNITY OF AFRICAN NATIONS;

10. This continental forum apart from presenting a UNITED PRESENCE OF AFRICA'S PEOPLES on the stage of history, must act as the organizational basis for ensuring that national umbrella organizations/consortia conform to the essential structure and mode of operation generally agreed;

11. This continental forum shall be linked to, relate with and co-operate with existing multilateral organizations (e.g., the United Nations and its agencies, the OAU, etc.). It should however not be subsumed under any of them. Rather, the entire edifice of national and continental consortia must be specifically capped by its own AFRICAN COUNCIL OF ELDERS for POPULAR PARTICIPATION in DEVELOPMENT (ACEPPD: or ACE for short);

12. The ACE is conceived as the crystallization of the most mature wisdom, experience and commitment in Africa. The prestige of this body could be decisive for the protection (on a continental scale) of the entire edifice.

Its members shall be made up of non-serving ELDER STATES - PERSONS OF AFRICA.

We take the liberty to place our best foot forward in proposing that illustrious Africans like Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd.), Dr. Leopold Sedar Senghor, etc., etc., be invited to serve on and give definition to the ACE;

13. The prestige and contacts of these elders shall be important in:

(a) Generating for the entire edifice and effort, the START-FUNDS (internationally) for building an African Fund for Popular Participation in Development;

(b) Conferring the necessary protection on national consortia to prevent irreverent, hostile or over-sensitive national governments from too readily destroying this awakening of their people ... even where every care is taken to avoid gratuitous conflict with governments; and

(c) Acting as supreme arbiter in difficult matters between and amongst national consortia;

14. The aforementioned African fund is to guarantee the self-reliance of Africa for its own development funding. This essentially African trust fund shall be developed to replace our continued dependence on Northern funding agencies and NGO for material empowerment. There is enough money in Africa to support this popular initiative. And the ACE has more than enough prestige to extract this money for our development. The fund can, without contradictions, benefit from one-shot enabling funds worldwide;

15. In the same spirit and complementary to the African fund, nations consortia shall also build up national trust funds for popular participation in development as well as regional and local development funds. The cardinal principle being always: enabling funds ... trust fund ... internal self-reliant funding of grass-roots projects. ... (see appendix 3 ... "Protocol of NAVDO on Development Funding").

We have provided here only the bare outlines of our proposal. We hope that further discussion at the workshop shall enrich and advance our collective thinking on this important question. We already have some framework (in Africa) on which we could build usefully: we have FAVDO (which, we expect, will be creatively extended), and we have a number of national consortia already in place. A great deal of work has already been done within NAVDO in the task of self-definition of the bicameral consortium (of VDOs) ... (see appendix 1).

If we are able to evolve a continental network as here proposed, placing our people in their popular organizations constantly at its centre, a major start would have been made. The ship of effective popular participation in the economic recovery and development of africa would have been securely launched. And the next meeting/workshop of this kind will include delegates of small-holder farmers, youths' delegates, rural women's delegates, delegates of city slum improvement associations, factory workers' mutual aid associations, etc., etc., from all across Africa. We shall then speak in Ki-Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Ga, etc., as well as English, French and Portuguese !!!